

LETTERS  
TO  
THE BRITISH NATION,  
AND TO  
THE INHABITANTS OF EVERY OTHER COUNTRY  
WHO MAY HAVE HEARD OF  
THE LATE SHAMEFUL OUTRAGES  
*Committed in this Part of the Kingdom.*

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PART I.

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Occasioned by the Appearance of a Pamphlet, intituled  
*'A Reply to the Rev. Dr. Priestley's Appeal to the  
Public, on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham.'*

BEING THE JOINT PRODUCTION OF  
THE PRINCIPAL CLERGY OF THAT PLACE AND  
OF ITS VICINITY.

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BY THE REV. J. EDWARDS.

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There is one publication, it is true, which perhaps it will be kind in me to recommend to your more serious and attentive perusal, and to that of all those in whose names you write, from your known passion for controversial superiority and ecclesiastical emolument; as I think you may with great advantage to your alma mater and coadjutors, employ yourself upon it during the rest of your life, provided you will undertake for once not merely to answer, but refute its arguments. It is intituled *An Appeal to the Public, &c.* not that I expect you will feel disposed to meddle any farther with this work, as we all know it may be traced to the same powerful and victorious hand under which you have already so very severely smarted.

*See the Rev. Spencer Madan's Letter to Dr. Priestley.*

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*Birmingham,*  
PRINTED BY JOHN THOMPSON;  
AND SOLD BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,  
LONDON.

# LETTERS

## TO THE

MEMBERS OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY

OF LONDON

BY

JOHN THOMSON

PRINTED BY JOHN THOMSON,  
AND SOLD BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,  
LONDON.



## LETTERS.

### LETTER I.

Has *Lico* learning, humour, thought profound?  
Neither: Why write then?—He wants twenty pound;  
His belly not his brains this impulse give,  
He'll grow *immortal* for he cannot *live*.

YOUNG.

### MY COUNTRYMEN,

**I** HAVE lately perused a most curious production, and had not the Secretary of the ecclesiastical junto informed us that it was the joint production of him and his brethren, I should have ascribed it, without hesitation, to some miserable scribbler who had been driven by his poverty to this shift. In vain did my expecting eye, with anxious care, watch each period, and each page as they passed under its view; I could find neither argument, nor order. Confusion, obscurity, assertion without proof, matters of fact unauthenticated, endless invective, and unbounded declamation, forced themselves upon me in *every part*. I was half persuaded to conceive myself placed in a similar situation to that in which the devil is described in Milton's second book of *Paradise Lost*. "I saw a dark *indefinite work* indeed instead of an *illimitable ocean*. It was however without any proper bound or dimension, where length, breadth, and height, and  
"time

"time, and place are lost. Where eldest Night and Chaos,  
 "ancestors of Nature, hold eternal anarchy amidst the noise  
 "of endless wars, and by *confusion* stand. For hot, cold,  
 "moist, and dry, four champions fierce, strive here for  
 "mastery," and all out of the same mouth, or in stricter  
 propriety, from the same pen. Since sometimes there is  
 compliment, and in the next breath invective, sometimes  
 flattery, and sometimes menace; and all respecting the  
 same body of men, or individuals belonging to it.

Who would ever have supposed any other than that  
 this had been the production of some common pamphlet-  
 teer? And how are we surprized to find it acknowledged  
 by the clergy of Birmingham. In what luckless hour,  
 respectable Sirs, did you put your names to such a farrago  
 of materials, whose only recommendation is a *plenty* of  
 words, and a most "*abundant lack of wit,*" and *argument*.  
 Excuse, my Countrymen, this prosopopeia, and through  
 the remainder of this Letter, I will address myself only to  
 you. To suppose you could not see through the artifice  
 with which these champions of the church, by a wonder-  
 ful stretch and exertion of their powers, whether given  
 them by nature, acquired at college, or obtained in a no-  
 vitiate of field preaching, have glossed over a great deal of  
 conscious demerit, would be to insult your understandings,  
 in a degree almost as aggravated as their own publication.  
 They never would have committed a work of so wretched  
 a description to the press had they not conceived you to  
 be destitute of every grain of common sense, and common  
 candour; and their adversaries not only destitute of ability,  
 but even devoid of all courage. Had they believed you to  
 be in possession of a single grain of common sense, they  
 would not have supposed you would have given ear to  
 slander or scurrility,—e. g. that a number of sober and  
 good men would set their own houses on fire, for the  
 pleasure of running away by the light—or that they would  
 raise



raise a mob merely for the pleasure of having their habitations destroyed, and their very lives endangered. Had they not presumed that every spark of candour was extinguished in your bosoms, they would never have dared to make such dreadful accusations against any set of men, however contemptible, without offering any shadow of proof (they are not to be witnesses in their own cause) except the bungling affidavit of a frightened landlord. It is evident that they consider their adversaries as destitute of all ability, and look upon this company concern, in which all the argument of all the Rev. Doctors and Masters of Arts, in and about Birmingham is concentrated, as quite unanswerable, or at least that no one is at all equal to the task but Dr. Priestley. One would suppose, that like the Invincible Armada, or the Spanish Gun Boats, this book had been christened by, and received the benediction of his Holiness the Pope. If this be the case, who knows but it may be a little ominous with respect to its fate. They must have been confident that there is no courage among their adversaries, or, after having told such falsehoods, they must have expected a contradiction. And then what a situation would they have been in. Clergymen, however brave, cannot with propriety fight duels. The general officers of the ecclesiastical army, would go near to break and cashier them in that case. And yet the authors of this book are among the appointed enlighteners of mankind! these are the men, whom the King of England, employs and pays to teach his subjects truth, virtue, and religion—to promote peace, and order, and sobriety! Were I he, these invaders of the peace of the town, in which they live (for I never saw a pamphlet better calculated to raise a riot) these defamers of their neighbours, should be instantly discharged from the sacred band, for they are evidently incorrigible by common discipline; else the literary lashing which they have received from the Herculean

Herculean arm of that injured individual to whom they wish so well, would make them close their lips in everlasting silence upon subjects of this nature. I would, my countrymen, be indignant against those who not content with living out of you contrary to your wills, endeavour to impose upon the goodness of your natures. But in this instance you must excuse me. I cannot throw away my anger upon the contemptible production which lies upon my window there. It is so infinitely beneath notice as a performance of men of religion, of learning, and of the clerical order, that one would, but for circumstances, and the opinion of the public, suffer it to sink silently into that oblivion, which, if it were neglected, it would soon procure for itself. For such things as these are but a nine days wonder at the most. They are a description of suicides which dig their own graves, and then bury themselves alive. But it comes from hands that are still, by some esteemed sacred. And those who are of this opinion will be on that account in some degree impressed by it. They are sensible of this advantage. And how they have used it, I will endeavour to shew you in the course of this publication. At present I remain,

My Countrymen,

EASY-ROW,

April 16, 1791.

Your sincere well-wisher,

J. EDWARDS.

LETTER



## LETTER II.

IPSE AGMEN.

MY COUNTRYMEN,

**T**HE redoubtable amanuensis of our clerical Synod, who, as it seems, would fain possess the public mind with the idea that he is their leader as well as champion, complains in his Preface of having "been *gently* reminded that "any thing from him in answer to Dr. Priestley's Appeal, "would be the very extreme of presumption." I am of that opinion. In this respect, Ahitophel could not have counselled him better. They deserve the name of friends who gave him such saving advice. It was indeed a little mortifying to a man of such unquestionable ability and literary prowess, to have the *smallest* hint given him in the most *gentle* manner, that his strength and skill was not superior to that of the Doctor's. More especially as he obtained the grinning honours of "the battle (as Falstaff would term them) in his former rencountre with this gentleman. It was a little hard that his adherents could not trust him "to offer his opinion freely on matters of fact, "the greater part of which fell under his own observation." This certainly in the estimation of a more modest man than the person who transcribed the Reply appears to be, would not have been to have "presumed too much." Now if he really was, with respect to most of the facts he has mentioned in this work, an eye-witness, I shall prove that  
he

he was a very inaccurate observer. But if he has asserted what neither he, nor any one else ever saw—what shall we say then? Certainly the public will consider him as having “*presumed too much.*” This I shrewdly suspect will turn out to be the case, viz. that he is too much of a declaimer, and possess of too strong an imagination, to set up for an accurate narrator of facts. If he, as a witness at the bar, had asserted what is asserted in this pamphlet, he would have been deprived by the cross-examination of all credit with the jury. However, let the public remember that the amanuensis is not to be answerable for the errata in his copy, any more than for those of the press; and as the printer (mentioning the press put me in mind of it) is waiting for more copy, I will once more subscribe myself,

My Countrymen,

Your sincere well-wisher,

J. EDWARDS.

LETTER



## LETTER III.

Fools will be meddling; and every meddling is to their hurt.

PRIESTLEY.

MY COUNTRYMEN,

**Y**OU will no sooner have read the work before me than you will form the opinion, that the Birmingham Synod never did an action more diametrically opposite to their own interests than delivering this work of theirs into the hands of the printer. I really cannot discern the reason why Mr. Secretary should be so ambitious of being thought its author. Nor why he should have treated the very friendly and *gentle* advice he mentions in his preface, with such undeserved contumely. Alas! he will repent but once of having murdered his time and his reputation in those few months which he threw away in its transcription,—to the end of his present life; if he does not, he is a clergyman, and knows as well as I, that he will inevitably do it in the life to come. To write such a book at such a time, was the extreme of folly, as well as presumption. It will be his misfortune not to see this early. It is well for him that it is a company concern. That the burden of public blame, if on account of his forwardness it should fall most heavy upon him (it does by no means argue wisdom in a leader to expose himself so in the van) will be in some degree at least, distributed. Otherwise neither his "*situation* as a minister of religion, and that in a *situation* (so many *situations* are almost as good as a *plurality*) where, he trusts, it

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will

will not be deemed arrogant in him to say his general character did not want a testimony of this nature" (it would have been an odd character which could have been served by such a testimony) would I fear have availed him but little. And even now I am half inclined to think his hearers will not think much the better of him four months hence, for having degraded himself into secretary to such a synod.

Some of my readers will probably wonder why I consider the ostensible author of this book as so little better than the amanuensis or secretary of this fraternity, as to merit no other title. I will tell you. He is one of the best scholars in English orthography (I never had the pleasure of seeing a specimen of their Latin or Greek compositions) among them. He is the most laborious man. He is, I am informed, so very eloquent, as to instruct his people extempore. I do not, however, mean to insinuate that this is done, without having first instructed himself with respect to the subject of his elocution. It would be a friendly part in any one, to wish they could say so with respect to this work. For it would not redound to the honour, even of an amanuensis, to write falsehoods knowingly.

I will not confine your attention much longer to this preface, or any thing in it. From its beautiful consistency, epigrammatic point, and true attic seasoning, I can easily believe this to be genuine.

"Dr. Priestley, in his Appeal, most evidently accuses "the clergy without *discrimination*." Mr Secretary is a clergyman, and therefore, he transcribes this reply out in a fair hand for the press, although he was not particularly "attacked." For Dr. Priestley to have attacked this gentleman would have been ungenerous. Even the pugilists, I am told, never strike their man after a *knock down blow*,  
till



till he is fairly on his legs again. "The *lion* is too magnanimous to trample upon the *fallen*." The truth is, his wiser brethren aware of the force of truth, especially when coming from a man of unimpeachable integrity, retire behind the curtain, and the moment they can obtain their couches of preferment, they recline upon them at their ease. if our worthy transcriber could rise on the shoulders of Priestley high enough to snatch a deanery or (glorious exaltation!) a seat on the diocesan bench, he would not run his head against a post in the dark again, as in this instance he has done! But perhaps he feels himself personally injured though not immediately attacked, when the Doctor in the course of his narrative, says of a Birmingham clergyman or two, whom he had condescended to confute (it was a little beneath him) he cursorily mentions that they "replied to his confutation without retracting any part of their charge." I do not suppose the Doctor could wonder much at this; if he did, I should wonder more at him, for expecting that people who are to be advanced for speaking in his disfavour, should ever think of retracting any thing they had said. This would be as politic, as for a waterman to cry stinking fish. Or a newsmen's intelligence-monger to subscribe at the bottom of his paragraphs, "A manufacturer of falshood."

If Mr. Madan be the god of Mr. Secretary's idolatry, he has offered up at his shrine a most unsavory kind of incense. He has told us a story which proves abundantly too much for his purpose; namely, that Mr. Madan writes in so elegant a style that people in the West of England concluded he must be "a kind of unprincipled savage" (he might as well have said a kind of undancing gentleman) "nay a very *Esau*," something still more rough and brutal, I suppose, than an *unprincipled savage*. I am not quite sure whether or no I fully understand the sentence subsequent to that which displays at once the

savage

savage mode of Mr. Madan's writing (they *are* ugly rough kind of things) in contrast with the urbanity of his manners, and the benevolence of his character. What a pity that he does not carry his urbanity and benevolence, which I believe are conspicuous in every other place, to his closet with him. Till then he cannot be "universally respected."

He asks, if the writer be deemed innocent, who are the guilty in this business? But surely it does not follow that because a man is *deemed* innocent, that therefore he really *is* innocent. Any person may be *deemed* innocent if he will take a little pains. If he had set himself forth as nothing more than an amanuensis, who for a proper consideration, had written out a fair copy of something for the press, not knowing whether what he wrote was true or false, he being in the way of his business might have been deemed innocent. The next sentence is to me still more obscure. "The very task he has undertaken supposes (if he "be an honest man) that he has no proofs of delinquency "against his brethren," if I had, I am sure I would not call them brethren till they had cleared themselves, "and" do reader observe this, "that he cannot possibly have a stronger "conviction of his *own* innocence, than *they* have of *theirs*." But what proof is it to me of the innocence of Mr. Secretary and company, that they have a good opinion of themselves; or that the rest of the junto severally think of their own innocence as favourably as Mr. Secretary himself. This is the most curious way of exonerating ones self from any charge I ever remember to have met with, except at the crown bar, where I have heard the greatest villains existing, plead *not guilty*. It is true, no man is obliged by the laws of this country to convict himself. But because a man speaks well, and with the *strongest possible marks of conviction*, of his *own innocence*, it by no means follows that he is not guilty. But perhaps I do not understand it. In the eleventh or twelfth edition (jest books



books and romances, collections of bon mots, anecdotes, and other funny things, have in this age a rapid sale) the writer will insert an explanatory note. For *Davus Sum non Oedipus*.

In the concluding sentence of this admirable preface, you will find full proof that what follows is not Mr. Secretary's own. For like a town crier he has chosen to speak in the name of the CLERGY OF BIRMINGHAM rather than in his own. He forgot one part of his office, namely, to prefix the Oyez. And the very best reason, reader, he can assign for undertaking this job, is that he speaks **THEIR SENTIMENTS**; and surely in this he does the duty of the office he has undertaken; he surely would not speak his own sentiments. It is the part of a cryer to speak, and of an amanuensis to write the sentiments and words of those who employ him.

I remain, your's, &c.

J. EDWARDS.

LETTER

## LETTER IV.

Sicelides Musa, parillo majora canamus  
 Jam nova progenies coelo demittitur alto.  
 O mihi tam longæ maneat pars ultima vitæ  
 Spiritus et, quantum sat erit vestra dicere facta.

VIRGIL.

MY COUNTRYMEN,

**W**E are now to expect something vastly clever. Having dispatched the secretary's preface, we come to the work of the whole synod conjointly. This bright constellation of illustrious genuses, these luminaries of that portion of the habitable globe which is distinguished from every other by the name of Birmingham, are about to present us with their joint stock of wit and knowledge. They are about to shew us what genius, improved by science and supported by integrity is able to effect. All hail ye genuine sons of the church. Ye modern Apostles, commissioned by a gracious sovereign, and in that far superior to those vulgarly called by that name. Will you, dread Sirs, permit me to call the public attention to the wonderful work of your united brains. Will you permit my profane eye, situated in a head unanointed and even untouched by the sacred hand of the mitred bishop, to search into the contrivance and structure of this curious mental manufacture of yours. You cannot be moved to notice in any shape, any thing that can be dictated by a mind which has grown rude and shapeless, and is filled with such ideas as nature itself might inspire into the breast of a kind of unprincipled savage, for want of having been properly disciplined in the monkish halls of those universities, from which, with a liberality like your own, all but churchmen are



are excluded. Priestley was grown into an oak so sturdy, that you were determined to break with a storm of indignation what would not bend even to the haughtiness of the Welch bishop\*. I, like the young and tender osier, bending, as I now do, in most submissive mood, reverencing the livery you wear, and considering the office you sustain, as of all others, the most useful, dignified and important, when it is diligently and faithfully exercised; I mean that of instructors of the ignorant, comforters of the afflicted, relievers of the oppressed, ministers of the most high God, preachers of the gospel of peace, and representatives of the redeemer of mankind, who *went about doing good*, ONLY. I say, I shall escape your notice, You love respect. You are fond of consequence. Behold one, who allows you every thing, who would not care if you were all bishops. Though even then it would be impossible for him to treat you with more respect than he does now. So much for compliments. Having, as it became me, my Countrymen, made my best and lowest bow at my first entrance into the company of these learned and reverend gentlemen, I shall from henceforth, according to a well known maxim of Lord Chesterfield, conceive myself, till I take my leave, upon a perfect equality with them.

I remain, yours, &c.

J. EDWARDS.

\* Bishop of St. David's.

ADVERTISEMENT

## ADVERTISEMENT.

HAVING heard that many very respectable members of the established church, consider it as incumbent upon Dr. Priestley to answer the pamphlet which gave occasion to these and the following Letters, and several of them having affirmed, that unless Dr. Priestley answers this last illustrious effort of the clerical combination, they shall credit every thing alleged against him, I write this to shew them the unreasonableness of the requisition.

Dr. Priestley is now at a distance. Had he been on the spot, the pamphlet in question would not perhaps have appeared, if it had, it would have been in a different guise. Otherwise Dr. Priestley, or the clergyman, whom I consider as little more than the amanuensis of the occasion, although he has prefixed his name to this candid and benevolent composition, must have quitted the town. One or other of them must be liars. And a person that ever had a character, will scarcely chuse to live in any place under the imputation of a malicious practice of that despicable vice.

I am on the spot. I can with ease oppose facts to facts. And evidence to evidence. And this is necessary, for we are now fairly brought before the bar of the public. After having impartially attended to the evidence, it is theirs to give the verdict.

I pledge myself to the public, to prove to absolute demonstration, that if Dr. Priestley's veracity is in any instance to be questioned, the combined writers of this reply are not worthy of public credit. And when I have done this, I will give permission to the boldest he, this amiable synod can furnish, to give me the lie direct. For after what I shall lay before the public, I shall not be afraid of losing any thing in the esteem of my Countrymen, by their most direct and positive assertions.

Again, let it be supposed that Dr. Priestley were arraigned at any other bar than that of the public. Would you believe him guilty, because his advocate pleaded, and not himself?

I am that advocate. And if I can satisfactorily prove the allegations of his adversaries to be false, or they themselves unworthy of having their testimony credited---in short, if I can prove the charges of partiality, misrepresentation and untruth upon this their joint production (and I never was so much mistaken if I cannot) every reasonable man will be satisfied. All, the public on this occasion can require is, *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.* And that requisition can be more completely answered by a person residing on the spot than by one at a distance. It is matter of fact that is now in question, not principles. I hope these will be thought sufficient and satisfactory reasons for my answering this bundle of depositions, instead of Dr. Priestley.